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LB 407

SENATOR WEHRBEIN: Mr. President, members, this is one of those very, very difficult decisions that comes in at kind of the eleventh hour and I'm not particularly critical of it. It's just that it's very difficult to...for me, at least, to make an informed decision. And I commend Senator Pedersen for bringing this to our attention, but I am going to oppose it and I'm going to suggest strongly that you put in a bill next year where it would have a full public hearing and find out the ramifications, because I don't know the ramifications. I've been told that the...many of the functions of that Lincoln Correctional Center, the staff, in other words, I don't know whether we could cut all the staff, but they are the food service, the perimeter security, one I can't even read my writing now, maintenance, laundry, canteen are all done out of that unit. So...and protective custody is there, mental health and treatment is there, and sex offenders are there. And so it's beyond my limited understanding, and that once again goes back to my problem. I have a hard time grasping all the ramifications of this. And on that basis, I'm reluctant to make a late hour decision on saving that money, which is certainly enticing. And I wonder the ramifications of our parole laws. Simply massively laying off or letting out people early based on our laws, I have no comprehension, no expertise at all in that area as to if it's impacted on our early releases, if it's impacted on our good time, if it's impacted on our bad time or whatever they call it. There's too many questions for me to make a decision for this amendment at this time. Now maybe I can be persuaded. I'm not against looking because in fact I thought about this myself of letting prisoners out. Other states have done that, let states (sic) out early. Once again, my memory goes back and I found the information and now I don't have it at my fingertips. It's true we don't have as many on parole as other states, but on the other hand, we have a relatively low incarceration rate per thousand. So even though it looks like we have a high incarceration rate and a low parole, in the scheme of things, we have a relatively low incarceration rate per thousand in the first place which implies to me that we are using probation at least a little more extensively than maybe other states already are. I can't prove that, don't know that. I'm subject to a challenge on that. But at this point, I'm just not convinced